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AFGHANISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Afghan Cashmere Reaches International Markets

High-quality cashmere satisfies UK market and provides income for Afghan farmers.



Photo: USAID/ASAP

The owner of Sodis Masood Co. Ltd inspects cashmere waiting to be packaged for export.

“At the beginning of the year, we were worried that the global economic recession might also affect the Afghan cashmere industry, but such deals show that there is a strong demand for Afghan cashmere,” said Haji Ghulam Mohammad Habibzada, owner of Sodis Masood Co. Ltd.

Despite a slumping demand for luxury goods in the world due to the economic crisis, international markets are waking up to opportunities in Afghanistan's nascent cashmere industry. Until recently, the value of cashmere was not recognized in the country, and much of its potential was lost when herders sheared their goats for wool. That all changed when USAID launched a nationwide campaign to increase awareness and educate male and female goat herders on how to harvest the product.

In tandem with efforts to teach herders to collect cashmere by combing their goats to harvest the fine hair, USAID began supporting regional cashmere collection warehouses to serve goat herders while lining up international buyers.

In May 2009, Sodis Masood Co. Ltd, an Afghan cashmere trading company based in Hirat that buys quality cashmere from regional goat herders, sold 20 metric tons of the product to Cashmere Fibers International Ltd. in the United Kingdom. At \$6.50 per kg, the deal was worth \$130,000.

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Cashmere Fibers will work with Hirat-based Macao Company to scour and disinfect the cashmere. Previously, Afghanistan lacked the technology needed to scour and disinfect cashmere, forcing international buyers to send the product to other countries in the region. Processing the product in-country is an encouraging step in promoting the cashmere industry to locals and foreigners alike.

“This is a very good deal, and I think it is the beginning of a good start for the Afghan cashmere industry. Such deals will definitely encourage farmers and traders to promote this valuable commodity,” Habibzada said. “I would like to thank everybody who helped promote and revive the Afghan cashmere industry.”